

OLD MAN

Old Man , or Lad's Love , - in the name there's nothing
To one that knows not Lad's Love, or Old Man ,
The hoar-green feathery herb , almost a tree ,
Growing with rosemary and lavender .

Even to one that knows it well the names
Half decorate , half perplex , the thing ~~xx~~ it is :
At least , what that is clings not to the names
In spite of time . And yet I like the names .

The herb itself I like not , but for certain
I love it , as some day the child will love it
Who plucks a feather from the doorside bush
Whenever she goes in or out of the house .

Often she waits there , snipping the tips and shrivelling
Their grey-green shreds on to the path , perhaps
Thinking , perhaps of nothing , till she sniffs
Her fingers and runs off . The bush is still
But half as tall as she , though 'tis as old ;
So well she clips it . Not a word she says ~~x~~ ;

And I can only wonder how much hereafter

She will remember , with that bitter scent ,
Of garden rows , and ancient damson-trees

* Topping a hedge , ~~xx~~ a bent path to a door ,
A low thick bush beside the door , and me

Forbidding her to pick .

As for myself ,

Where first I met that bitter scent is lost .

I , too , often shrivel the grey shreds ,

Sniff them and think and sniff again and try

Once more to think what 'tis I am remembering ,

Always in vain . I cannot like the scent ,

Yet I would rather give up others more sweet ,

With no meaning , than this bitter one .

I have mislaid the key . I sniff the spray

And think of nothing , I see and I hear nothing ,

Yet seem , too , to be listening , lying in wait

For what I should yet never can remember :

No garden appears , no path , no hoar-green bush

Of Lad's Love , or Old Man , no child beside ,

Neither father nor mother , nor any playmate ;

Only an avenue , dark , nameless , without end .